A

DIALOGUE

ON

TASTE.

Ουδεν εν ανθροποισι διακριδον εστι νοημα,
Αλλ' ὁ συ θαυμαζοις τουθ' ετεροισι γελως. LUCIAN.

Mille hominum ſpecies, et rerum diſcolor uſus:
Velle ſuum cuique eſt, nec voto vivitur uno. PERSIUS.

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A

DIALOGUE ON TASTE.

LORD MODISH's Country-Seat.

LORD and LADY MODISH, LADY HARRIOT, and COLONEL FREEMAN.

LORD MODISH.

AND ſo you prefer HUDIBRAS to VIRGIL?

COL. FREEMAN.

I do indeed, my Lord.

LORD MODISH.

But why, my noble Colonel?

COL. FREEMAN.

Becauſe he gives me moſt pleaſure.

LORD MODISH.

Then allow me to tell you, George, you are with all your reading an abſolute Goth, and have no manner of taſte.

COL. FREEMAN.

So you told me laſt night, my Lord, when I preferred Canary to Champaign.

LORD MODISH.

No doubt; for that was juſt ſuch another inſtance of your Gothicneſs.

COL. FREEMAN.

I agree with your Lordſhip that the caſes are very parallel, and for that reaſon I mention your laſt night's obſervation. The word *taſte* originally belongs to the palate, and it is not amiſs to have that always in view, when we ſuſpect a miſapplication of it in the way of metaphor. It is by taſte, no doubt, that we are able to diſtinguiſh ſalt from ſugar, and muſtard from apple-pie; its proper office being upon all ſuch occaſions to inform us what is what. But allow me to aſk your Lordſhip, why you ſaid I had no taſte in wine, when it was plain, by my preference of one of the bottles, that I could very well diſtinguiſh it from the reſt.

LORD

LORD MODISH.

You certainly now affect to misunderstand me. By saying you had no taste, I did not mean that you was not capable of distinguishing; but, according to the usual application of the phrase, that you had a bad taste, and preferred the worst.

COL. FREEMAN.

This is, my Lord, an application of the word *taste*, that, however usual, somewhat deviates from its original and proper sense. For, according to that, good taste can signify no more than a greater than ordinary accuracy in determining, in certain cases, that two distinct things are of the same or of different kinds, and when of different kinds in assigning the proper name to each. Take a man so endowed into your cellar, and without seeing the labels, he will tell you not only that this hogshead is Port and that Claret, but amongst the Clarets that this is of such a growth and such a year, that of such another. I am very sensible that your Lordship's application of the phrase is nevertheless usual: but if all the phrases that convey no distinct and invariable meaning were banished out of the world, we should be deprived, among the rest, of a great many that are very usual and fashionable. But, *a propos* of our last night's liquor, did you mean by the worst the least whole-

wholeſome? If ſo, I am afraid my taſte can hardly be defended.

LORD MODISH.

No, faith; I believe the Champaign is the worſt of the two in that reſpect. No; I meant that which had the worſt flavour.

COL. FREEMAN.

Then I ſuppoſe you think me inſincere in my declaration of liking Canary.

LORD MODISH.

I have known you too long, George, to lay inſincerity to your charge. No; I make no doubt of your having really a very bad taſte in your potations.

COL. FREEMAN.

You mean, then, I dare ſay, that it is not your taſte.

LORD MODISH.

No; nor of any of your acquaintance, I'll be ſworn.

COL. FREEMAN.

So then the goodneſs or badneſs of one's taſte is to be determined by the taſte of the majority.

LORD MODISH.

Certainly; and were it otherwiſe what confuſion muſt enſue? for when men are to drink jovially together, it is highly reaſonable that the

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few ſhould yield in the choice of the liquor to the many.

COL. FREEMAN.

My Lord, I will allow your conſequence: But what neceſſity is there for this ſociety in drink, by which the conformity becomes neceſſary? When ſoldiers are to attack the enemy, ſuch an union muſt be abſolutely neceſſary; elſe one platoon might retire whilſt another advanced. It is no leſs neceſſary where more pacific people are met to dance country-dances; elſe the man might be footing corners, whilſt his partner was figuring in. Unleſs all fight and dance with one accord, the purpoſes of fighting and dancing would be entirely fruſtrated. But there is nothing in the nature of drinking, that hinders it from being performed as effectually, and to as good purpoſe, by a ſingle perſon, as by one that has thirty legions at his back. When you can make it appear that a man ought to take phyſic becauſe his friend his ſick, or to drink becauſe he is dry, it may then appear reaſonable in him to drink of a particular kind of liquor becauſe his companions happen to be pleaſed with the flavour of it: an extraordinary ſtretch of complaiſance, from which no perſon ſeems to reap any advantage. For my own part, I profeſs myſelf an entire friend to toleration and liberty of conſcience, and think it little better than popery and the inquiſition to compel any man to ſwallow what

goes againſt his ſtomach, on pretence of preſerving unity in public drinking.

LORD MODISH.

Thou art an odd fellow, George, that is certain.

COL. FREEMAN.

I am indeed, my Lord; for I always deliver my own ſentiments, and in my own words.

LORD MODISH.

So then you reckon religion and drinking to be of the ſame nature. I think I have known you ſometimes more lucky in your compariſons.

COL. FREEMAN.

I don't pretend, my Lord, that the parallel will hold in every reſpect; but with regard to the ſubject of our preſent converſation they are certainly very much akin: being both matters of private concern and advantage only; and, of courſe, the objects only of taſte or private opinion. But when I ſpeak of religion, I would be underſtood of what is ſpeculative and ritual, and not at all of the moral duties: So when I ſpeak of drinking, I mean drinking for pleaſure, without taking any of its medicinal effects into conſideration; for as by theſe ſociety may be affected, they are very properly the objects of general concern and enquiry.

LORD MODISH.

Then you don't allow the moral duties to be the objects of taſte. My Lord Shafteſbury is of a very different opinion.

COL. FREEMAN.

That may be; but his Lordſhip ſtands not for divine authority with me. I know, my Lord, that there has been much unfortunate pains employed, by many authors from Plato down to Sir Harry Beaumont, in order to confound the objects of judgment with thoſe of taſte and feeling; than which nothing can be more vulgar and unphiloſophical.

LORD MODISH.

I fancy it is not an eaſy matter to ſeparate them; and, as I know you have turned your mind pretty much to ſuch enquiries, I ſhould be glad to know what touchſtone you recommend for that purpoſe.

COL. FREEMAN.

It does not appear to me ſo difficult as it ſeems to thoſe refined philoſophers; and thus I diſtinguiſh them. Whatever has a rule or ſtandard to which it may be referred, and is capable of compariſon, is not the object of taſte, but of reaſon and judgment. On the other hand, the proper objects of taſte, or feeling, are ſuch as are relative to the perſon only who is actuated by them, who is the ſole judge whether thoſe feelings be agreeable, or otherwiſe; and

being

being informed of this ſimple fact from himſelf; no farther conſequence can be drawn from it, neither does it admit of any diſpute. Thus when a man tells me that veniſon eats better with currant than with gravy ſauce, he only informs me of his private opinion concerning it. It admits of no reaſoning, pro or con. There it muſt reſt, and he muſt have the like patience to hear me, in my turn, declare that gravy ſauce is far before currant; and this without making any reply, if he has a grain of ſenſe. It is quite otherwiſe when either he or I aſſert that Weſtminſter hall is longer than Weſtminſter bridge, or that oak is ſpecifically heavier than copper; for in each of thoſe caſes there is a ſtandard to apply, to wit, a foot rule in one caſe, and a pair of ſcales in the other, which entirely exclude opinion from having any ſhare in the debate. With regard to one thing's being comparatively better than another, there is likewiſe a ſtandard of another kind, which leaves the preference to be decided by the judgment; and that is the relation which ſuch things bear to the uſe for which they are both ſuppoſed to be intended. As for inſtance, if it ſhould become the ſubject of enquiry which of two ſwords is the beſt, the intention of fighting being ſuppoſed, the preference will be reaſonably given to that, which, by its ſuperior ſtrength, lightneſs, ſharpneſs, and perhaps length, is the fitteſt for fight. If, for the ſame purpoſe, the compariſon happens between a ſword and a pair of ſciſſars, the pre-

preference will, no doubt, fall to the ſword for very obvious reaſons. But vary the circumſtances of the intended combat, and explain that it is not to be fought in a field, but in a poſt chaiſe or a centry box, and you will be obliged to rejudge the cauſe by a new ſtandard, which will infallibly declare a pair of ſciſſars to be a more fatal, and conſequently a better, weapon than any Toledo in the world. It is poſſible, by thus ſuppoſing certain circumſtances, to bring the moſt different and moſt remote objects in nature to be compared by a common ſtandard; but where this is not provided, reaſon muſt be pleaſed to leave the bench, and refer the matter entirely to taſte, or private inclination. It is that alone which can determine a young Lady in her choice between pink and blue, or perhaps between her Dancing-maſter, and the Sheriff of the County; and from ſuch a ſentence there lies no appeal. Having thus, as I think, fairly ſtated the different pretenſions of judgment and taſte, I will leave it to your Lordſhip to pronounce whether they are ſo like one another as to be eaſily miſtaken.

LORD MODISH.

In the way you have ſtated the affair there can be no difficulty, and the maxim, that *there is no diſputing of taſtes*, is one of thoſe that are the moſt univerſally received.

COL. FREEMAN.

The maxim is, as you ſay, my Lord, in every body's mouth, but there are very few whoſe under-

underſtandings are at all the better for it. I have, you know, in the courſe of my life, mixed in a great variety of ſcenes, civil and military, and have made one in all ſorts of companies, from her Grace's drawing-room to a Graveſend tilt-boat, but have ever found, at leaſt, three fourths of the converſations, high and low, to be employed in each perſon's declaring his own taſte, and decrying that of his companions: a method of ſpending time which appeared to me ſo unintereſting, ſo unentertaining, and ſo unprofitable, that it has contributed more than any thing elſe to the ſolitary and bookiſh life that I have led for ſome years paſt. Not but that I find, every now and then, ſome of my calf-ſkin companions, who are guilty of the ſame egotiſms, impertinently endeavouring to palm upon me their own opinions and thoſe of their maſters, inſtead of argument and matter of fact; but then I can more eaſily get rid of their company. I was laſt Sunday drinking tea at Lady Faddleton's, where unfortunately Miſs Molly Bright happened to be mentioned as a beauty, and produced a diſpute of an hour and a half, that made me ſorry the holineſs of the day did not ſuffer me to propoſe whiſt; for I think a total ſilence not ſo bad as ſo perverſe an abuſe of ſpeech.

LADY HARRIOT.

And pray, Colonel, don't you think Miſs Molly Bright handſome?

COL.

COL. FREEMAN.

Suppoſe, Madam, I ſhould ſay yes; what would your Ladyſhip infer from my anſwer? Nothing more, I preſume, than that ſhe was handſome in my eyes. Were you deſirous of knowing what ſhe appeared in my Lord's, I fancy you would be under a neceſſity of putting the ſame queſtion to him, juſt as if it had never been put to me.

LADY HARRIOT.

Then you think it is all fancy, and that there is nothing real in beauty.

COL. FREEMAN.

I have, Madam, too much reaſon to believe that there is ſomething real in its effects, if you will accept of that as an anſwer.

LADY HARRIOT.

I am not philoſopher enough to know whether it be an anſwer or not. But ſure, Colonel, you muſt own there are ſome women whom all the world allows to be handſome.

COL. FREEMAN.

Your Ladyſhip ſeems to be more a philoſopher than you are willing to acknowledge. You are endeavouring, I find, to withdraw female beauty from amongſt the number of thoſe things which are merely the objects of taſte, by

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an appeal to a matter of fact, the general ſentiments of mankind. But, ſuppoſing the fact to be concluſive, I do not underſtand how it can be ſo aſcertained as to become a ſafe foundation for any ſuperſtructure of reaſoning.

LADY MODISH.

Perhaps, Colonel, you do not allow there is ſuch a thing neither as uglineſs. Could you prove that point, there are ſome Ladies whom the whole town would think vaſtly beholden to you.

COL. FREEMAN.

The caſe of deformity is ſomewhat different, Madam, from that of beauty: Deformity may be ſubject to enquiry, and reducible to certain principles, altho' beauty ſhould not. A face which has one eye larger than the other, which has the mouth awry, or one cheek fat and the other lean, is certainly deformed, and in this all men will agree. But it does not follow that the reverſe of theſe will produce beauty. As to the agreement which Lady Harriot has obſerved with regard to the beauty of certain females, I believe it will not be difficult to account for it without allowing it to be real. As for inſtance, let us ſuppoſe that two or three of thoſe worthies, who are by fate appointed to ſet faſhions in our great city, ſhould from amongſt five thouſand young women, equally free of deformity, pick out Miſs Thingum, at random, and toaſt her upon all

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occaſions for a burning beauty. What will be the conſequence? Thoſe who are an inch below them in faſhionability, if you will allow me the word, will catch the ſound, and convey it like the watch-word of a camp from the Generaliſſimo to the centinel. The machine being once ſet in motion, there is nothing to obſtruct its progreſs. The men of ſenſe never tire other people with declaring their own taſtes, and are equally unwilling to loſe their time in diſputing the taſtes of others. Amongſt the fools there is here and there one to be found, who will engage in the wiſe controverſy, and will ſay, *Indeed I don't ſee any thing ſo ſuperlatively handſome in Miſs Thingum, that there ſhould be all this rout made about her*; but the greateſt part of them are ſuch poltroons as to be afraid of oppoſing the prevailing cry for fear of ſhewing their ignorance, always ſuppoſing beauty to be a ſcience which it is incumbent upon every gentleman to underſtand. This I am ſure of, that there is nothing more common, both for fools and men of ſenſe, than when their toaſt is demanded, to give a faſhionable beauty whom they never ſaw. As to the Ladies, tho' none of them can be ſuppoſed much ſmitten with Miſs Thingum, yet they are all unanimous in allowing her to be handſome, and this from a very obvious motive. They all know that any heſitation from them would be aſcribed to envy, which, as it would both leſſen themſelves,

ſelves, and add to the triumph of their rival, they are at a great deal of pains to hide; and all the while that they look upon her ſway as uſurpation, they, for their own ſakes, aſſert her divine right. Mankind upon many ſuch occaſions become their own dupes, and fall proſtrate before the idols which themſelves have ſet up; but hiſtory, Lady Harriot, and the inveſtigation of facts will always enable us to ſet the true ſtamp upon ſuch ſublime pretenſions. Whatever is natural is of divine origin, and the firſt ſource of it will be for ever hid from our vain curioſity; but all ſham claims to divinity are eaſily expoſed, whenever the proper means are employed. Would you, for inſtance, be certified whether any particular race of Kings are by divine appointment, you need only trace their ſteps, and it is ten to one but you find the firſt of them at the head of a gang of rebels, murderers, and banditti. The ſame method of enquiry will ſet us right, as to the unbounded empire which town-toaſts pretend to exerciſe over our hearts. A very little tracing will convince us, that altho' they are women by the eternal appointment of the Almighty, they owe their being, as univerſal beauties, to a very few men, and thoſe perhaps neither the wiſeſt nor the ſobereſt of their ſpecies. At leaſt we may in this manner account for the apparent univerſality of ſentiment concerning them, to a degree that will render

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it too doubtful for any concluſion to be drawn from it.

LORD MODISH.

My dear Colonel, your hiſtory of Miſs Thingum, as you call her, is very plauſible; but you have not given us the proof of any of thoſe facts by which you pretend to trace the progreſs of her glory. You ſeem here, I think, to give more indulgence to your own gueſſes than you are commonly willing to allow to thoſe of other people.

COL. FREEMAN.

Your objection, my Lord, is very juſt; and as I knew not how to ſtrip thoſe general facts of the appearance of gueſſes, I was not very poſitive in my inferences from them. My notion, however, of that matter is formed from real obſervations, ſtrong enough from their number to convince myſelf; tho' ſingly too inconſiderable, to be of weight in a queſtion of ſo general a nature, or to be urged as proof to your Lordſhip: unleſs your experience happen to coincide with mine; which I am apt to believe is in ſome meaſure the caſe, by your allowing my account to be plauſible. But I have an argument much more clearly founded againſt the agreement of mankind, with regard to the beauty of any particular female; which is, that ſuch an univerſality of ſentiments would ſtand in contradiction to all the

hitherto known principles of nature: for it would have been given in vain, if not for very deſtructive purpoſes. For what could be ſuppoſed more ridiculous, and even fatal, than for all the inhabitants of London and Weſtminſter to be real, inſtead of pretended, admirers of one woman? Happily for the world, their practice, which is much more to be depended on than their words, ſhews us that this is far from being the caſe; and that each of them has his fair, for whom he ſighs in private, and whoſe name he thinks too ſacred to be mingled with the ribaldry and midnight debauch of a tavern.

LADY HARRIOT.

That may be very true, Colonel; but may not a man think a woman beautiful without being in love with her? and on the contrary, may he not be in love with one whom he does not think beautiful? There is a thing they call the agreeable, which has often more powerful effects than mere beauty.

LORD MODISH.

Harriot is certainly in the right there, George; I believe there is no body but has, ſome time or other, felt that diſtinction.

COL. FREEMAN.

My Lord, I have often heard the diſtinction; but I am apt to ſuſpect that it conſiſts only

only in the oppoſition of real ſentiment to miſtaken knowledge; or rather, of a word with a meaning to one that has little or none.

LORD MODISH.

I ſhould be glad to have that explained.

COL. FREEMAN.

Indeed, my Lord, the diſtinction betwixt beautiful and agreeable, when applied to faces, is barely verbal, and will vaniſh, together with all the difficulties attending this ſubject, immediately upon a preciſe definition of thoſe words. We have only to aſk ourſelves, what is *beauty*? The philoſophical anſwer, is, *That form which pleaſes.* Let us next aſk, what is meant by an agreeable form; the anſwer is certainly, *That which pleaſes.* So that to determine which of the two, the beautiful or the agreeable woman, when put in oppoſition, is the genuine beauty, we need only examine the actual effects of both; and if it appears that love and deſire are attendant upon agreeable women no leſs than upon beauties, as both your Lordſhip and Lady Harriot ſeem to allow, it will follow that the agreeable woman is really beautiful in the eyes of that man to whom ſhe is agreeable, any reaſoning or faſhion to the contrary notwithſtanding.

LORD MODISH.

Suppoſing your notion of the agreeable to be juſt, I ſhould be glad to know what is then meant by beauty in oppoſition to what pleaſes only. You know it is a word in every body's mouth, and you cannot imagine they mean nothing at all by it. If I were inclined to doubt them, my own ſentiments would convince me of their ſincerity. Is there no ſuch thing as regular features, which may ſatisfy the judgment, without touching the heart?

COL. FREEMAN.

I have many reaſons, my Lord, to believe there is not, but, without having recourſe to any, the diſcourſe of thoſe who value themſelves the moſt upon their connoiſſeurſhip in beauty, is ſufficient to convince us that they talk with as little reflection as feeling upon the ſubject. Aſk one of them what he means by *regular* features; he will firſt be ſurprized at your ignorance; and if you perſiſt in your enquiry, will tell you, *features that are in due proportion*; aſk what he means by due proportion, and he will perhaps tell you, after much ſtammering, *that Lady ſomebody's features are in due proportion*; aſk why he thinks her features in due proportion, he will tell you, *becauſe they are regular*; and if you carry on your queſtions to all eternity, the anſwers will ſtill trot

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in the ſame circle they ſet out in; and tho' very far from making us more knowing than we were, are perhaps the beſt anſwers that the the ſubject affords. The folly lies in anſwering at all to ſuch queſtions.——You ſeem in deep contemplation, my Lord.

LORD MODISH.

Faith, George, I was firſt rummaging my brain to ſee whether I could not find there ſome rules by which features might be adjuſted; but to no purpoſe. From that I have gone upon a more humble ſearch, to try if I could diſcover what it was that had all along induced me to ſpeak of ſuch things. For I aſſure you I meant ſomething; tho', to deal ſincerely, I am not able, at this time, to tell what. Are you conjuror enough to gueſs what I meant?

COL. FREEMAN.

If my knowledge and penetration were equal to your Lordſhip's candor I ſhould not deſpair, however difficult the taſk, of giving you complete ſatisfaction. But as it is only a gueſs you demand, you ſhall have it, hit or miſs; and the more readily as this is not the firſt time I have endeavoured to account to myſelf, for ſo whimſical a phenomenon in human nature. A very little ſedate reflection muſt convince a man of ſenſe that there is no ſtandard of female beauty, to which all the various degrees of it may be referred; and yet it is no leſs plain that thoſe

who every day ſo earneſtly diſpute about thoſe various degrees, muſt have ſomething which they perſuade themſelves is a ſtandard. The queſtion is only, how they came by ſuch a perſuaſion? My conjecture is, that it is acquired by early education, and ſo early, that no man is able to remember its firſt eſtabliſhment in his mind. I ſuppoſe a child of two years old is told that *Miſs what do you call it*, whom he ſees perhaps every day, is vaſtly handſome. This being the firſt time of his learning the word handſome or beautiful, and connecting an idea to it, he will never after be able to ſeparate the word from its original impreſſion; but will, from that accidental conjunction, form to himſelf a general ſyſtem of beauty, and will keep it up, by a ſucceſſive application of it to other women, many years after ſhe who give birth to his ſyſtem is forgotten. And thus by a perverſe adherence to theory, in a matter entirely practical, he will perſiſt to his dying day in extolling a certain ſort of faces for which he has not the leaſt deſire or affection. In this manner five hundred men may have five hundred ſtandards of beauty; which tho' all taken from women without any deformity or juſt exception, may be all exceedingly different from one another. What wonder is it then that one man's verdict upon a woman's beauty ſhould be ſo little ſatisfactory to his companion, who meaſures her by another

other ſcale. This cannot be called *diſputing taſtes*; becauſe taſte or ſentiment is here entirely excluded; but it is equally uſeleſs and irrational.

Such, however, ſeem to be the grounds upon which the common run of mankind venture to give their judgment in thoſe matters. With regard to the more inſtructed and polite, there is another circumſtance, which, having more the appearance of a common ſtandard, has abundantly aſſiſted in running them into diſputes concerning beauty; and that is the agreement of painters and ſculptors upon that head; which they ſuppoſe could not happen, if every artiſt was left to his own particular feeling of beauty, without any principles to guide him. But it is very eaſy to account for this agreement, without finding ourſelves much nearer an univerſal ſtandard than we were at firſt. No ſooner were the arts of painting and ſculpture brought to ſome degree of excellence, but the artiſts, in repreſenting a Venus, an Helen, or any other perſonage, from whom beauty was expected, muſt have found all their endeavours to pleaſe rendered ineffectual by the variety of ſentiments which different men, by the various ſtructure of their nerves and organs, have of beauty: ſo that the painter's miſtreſs however beautiful ſhe might appear to him, and however juſtly he might portray her, would have little chance of charming the ſpectators,

who would each think his own Dulcinea infinitely ſuperior to the Venus. Neither would he mend the matter by ſubſtituting a beauty of his judgment, according to the method juſt deſcribed, whilſt every man had a ſtandard of his own, equally partial, by which he condemned it. Here neceſſity, the mother of invention, would come to his aſſiſtance, and ſet him upon a method that, although it might charm few, would diſguſt no body; that is, to form a face that ſhould affect a medium in all its features and proportions, carefully avoiding every thing extraordinary, however himſelf might be ſtruck with it. He muſt have found that tho' one man, either by a peculiarity of real taſte, or of acquired preposſeſſion, was fond of a high noſe; another thought it deteſtable. That to one a fat cheek was charming, to another a lean one, and that each deſpiſed the other's choice as deformed and ridiculous. The painter's buſineſs was therefore to ſteer as clear as poſſible of theſe oppoſite rocks, and to give his goddeſs neither a high nor a low, but a ſtreight noſe, with cheeks that were neither fat nor lean, preſerving the ſame mediocrity in all the proportions of her face. Upon ſuch a principle as this we may ſuppoſe it was that Polycletus formed his Venus, which Pliny ſays was called the canon or ſtandard; and that he actually did

did ſo, ſtill farther appears by all the antique ſtatues now remaining; which, by their great ſimilarity, plainly appear to be all copies, more or leſs exact, of one original, framed upon this cautious principle. But it is one thing not to be deformed, and another to be beautiful; one thing to avoid cenſure, and another thing to pleaſe. Neither have I met with ought in the opinions of the eminent painters and ſculptors, with whom I am uſed to converſe, that any way inclines me to alter mine with regard to this matter. Thoſe of them who have ſpent ſome of their beſt years in the ſtudy of the antique ſtatues, and the modern imitations of them all over Italy, have told me that upon their firſt acquaintance they were not ſo much ſtruck with the beauty of their faces; but that the more they ſaw them, the more their admiration of them encreaſed. But this after-admiration is far from being a proof of their having any thing remarkably beautiful in themſelves; and is nothing more than the common effect of habit, which ſhews itſelf not only in things of an indifferent nature, ſuch as cookery, dreſs, and furniture, but often alſo in things that are at firſt extremely nauſeous and diſagreeable, ſuch as tobacco, coffee, and other drugs, which by uſe become ſo bewitching, that their votaries rather chuſe to part with their health than reſign them. Here then, in the antique, we find a ſort of common meaſure,

but

but which falls mightily in its value when we conſider that it is only of a negative kind, from which no excellence, no ſtriking grace can be expected: and likewiſe that, imperfect as it is, it is known only to a few, perhaps not one in a hundred of thoſe who talk about regular features; and of thoſe few there is ſtill a much ſmaller number, chiefly painters and ſculptors, on whom the habit of looking at thoſe antiques has been ſo conſtant as to make any real impreſſion. In ſuch it may be called their taſte; but, as I hinted ſome time ago, we muſt be careful not to ſay that ſuch people have a good or a bad taſte; ſince whatever is truly taſte, whether it belonged originally to the nerves, or was produced in them by habit, admits of no compariſon, in point of excellence. All we can ſay with propriety is, that ſuch a man has the tobacco taſte, or the ſugar-candie taſte, or the antique taſte; that is, he likes tobacco, ſugar-candie, or the antique. This has in it nothing comparative, and is only an aſſertion concerning a matter of fact of the ſimpleſt kind.

But, my Lord, I find my eagerneſs in endeavouring to ſatisfy your Lordſhip's demand, has led me into a Profeſſorial kind of diſcourſe, that will be little agreeable, I am afraid, to the Ladies. It is the common effect of ſuch ſubjects; ſo let us call a new cauſe. Pray, Lady Modiſh, has your Ladyſhip ſeen the two new dancers that Rich has brought over?

LADY

LADY MODISH.

Whether I have, or have not, I ſha'n't tell you. And truly, Colonel, you ought to make us ſome apology for breaking off a ſerious converſation upon our account; as if we were incapable of being entertained by any thing but trifles. It is true we are ſeldom tried with any thing elſe, but that is not ſo much our fault as that of you men; who think, no doubt, to preſerve your authority the better by keeping us in ignorance.

LADY HARRIOT.

Indeed, Colonel, the concluſion of your ſpeech does not deſerve, either from my ſiſter or me, any acknowledgments that are favourable; and yet, ſuch is my goodneſs, I cannot help owning that I have been much better entertained with your explanation of taſte, than ever I was with any of thoſe diſputes which it daily occaſions. Moſt men, indeed, who enter upon nice ſubjects before Ladies, ſeem rather, by their latin and cramp words, to aim at aſtoniſhing, than either entertaining or inſtructing us. But I muſt do you the juſtice to ſay that this is never your practice; for you always expreſs yourſelf in ſo plain a way that I fancy I comprehend your whole meaning, tho' it is probable I am ſometimes miſtaken.

COL. FREEMAN.

I acknowledge, Ladies, both the juſtice and gentleneſs of your rebuke, and am perfectly ſenſible that, if I am not underſtood in a ſubject like this, which is not peculiar to any art or profeſſion, the defect is in me, and not in either of your Ladyſhips. And as for the cramp words Lady Harriot mentions, they are ſeldom any thing but ſkreens which vanity has hitherto employed in order to hide ignorance. Of late, philoſophy has put on a more familiar air, and is not aſhamed to have it known that ſhe is nothing but common ſenſe and experience methodiſed; and it ſeems now agreed that the truly learned language is that which is beſt underſtood.

LORD MODISH.

I muſt own, Colonel, that the notion of an univerſal ſtandard for the beauty of natural objects, would be very contradictory to that almoſt ſelf-evident truth, that *whatever is is right*; ſince in the great variety of forms which God has contrived, the benign end of pleaſing would have been fruſtrated, if he had not ordained a like variety to exiſt in the apprehenſions and feelings of different men as well as of different animals concerning thoſe things.

COL. FREEMAN.

It is moſt certainly ſo, my Lord; and it is ſurprizing that ſo many ingenious men ſhould have

have loſt their time in a ſearch, the vanity of which is ſo obvious. Hogarth owns that his line of beauty and grace is not to be ſeen in a toad; which if true, ought to have convinced him, either that there was no ſuch line, or univerſal receipt for beauty; or elſe that he had not yet hit upon it: ſince it hardly admits of a doubt, that a blooming ſhe toad is the moſt beautiful ſight in the creation, to all the crawling young gentlemen of her acquaintance; and that her crawl, or as they may poſſibly call it, her *pas grave*, is far before the minuet ſtep, with all its wavings. An analyſis or diſſection can never be begun of any ſubject till the ſubject itſelf is aſcertained, and conſequently no analyſis can be made of abſtract beauty, nor of any abſtraction whatſoever. Till a real ſomething is diſcovered, which we are ſure by experience is univerſally the ſource of pleaſure, any attempt to diſcover the univerſal principle of pleaſure by analyſis muſt be fruitleſs; and the philoſopher who engages in ſuch a buſineſs, after finding that he has been gravely meaſuring a dream with a pair of compaſſes, will probably return at laſt to the *je ne ſcay quoy*, upon which he had at firſt diſdainfully turned his back. Does your Lordſhip know Sir Roger North?

LORD MODISH.

Yes, a little; he ſeems to be a comical hearty old fellow.

COL.

COL. FREEMAN.

He is ſo, my Lord; but he is ſomething more; for he is a man of a good deal of learning and reflection; though, by a ſtrange turn of temper, he ſeems to be at pains to conceal it, and when his good ſenſe makes its appearance, it is commonly under the diſguiſe of waggery. I happened to be walking in the Mall with Sir Harry Beaumont, about a week after Crito was publiſhed, when Sir Roger came up to us, and, after congratulating his brother Baronet upon the ſucceſs of his performance, and the figure it was like to give him in the eyes of the Miſſes, as an arbiter of beauty, Sir Harry, ſays he, I obſerve that in your diſtribution of grace you give twenty degrees to Mrs. A***, and thirty to Mrs. B***. Now I do not find fault with your tables, but I ſhould be glad to know by what ſcale, weight, or meaſure you compute their ſeveral ſhares with ſo much preciſion. You certainly, anſwered Sir Harry, did not read my paper with much attention, or elſe you would have ſeen that *I did not pretend to have made my calculations exactly*; but rather *to point out what might be done by more exact judges of beauty*. Ay, but, Sir Harry, ſays the old Knight, let who will calculate thoſe tables of beauty, it will have but a very unſcholarlike appearance, if, when the exactneſs of their calculations happens to be called in queſtion, they

ſhould have nothing better to appeal to, than the infallibility of their own judgments. I am afraid that method would hardly paſs muſter at the Royal Society. Now, you muſt know, when I was a boy I was a great dab at figures, and though I ſeldom foul my fingers with pen and ink, I have not yet forgot the rules, and have been thinking that the rule of three or rule of proportion, might be applied ſo as to become a golden rule in comparing beauties as much as any thing elſe. It is performed, you know, by multiplying the firſt by the ſecond, and dividing by the third; and being curious this morning to know with exactneſs how much Mrs. D*** excelled in beauty Mrs. C***, I thus ſtated the queſtion, *as a cat is to a wheel-barrow ſo is Mrs. C*** to Mrs. D****; but though I tried till my brain was ready to crack, I never could contrive how to multiply a cat by a wheel-barrow; ſo I could go no farther in my calculations. Now if you, or any other virtuoſo, could fall upon the method of multiplying and dividing ſuch matters; I am perſuaded you would find out a certain method of gauging every woman's beauty, and *prevent it from being any longer left*, as you juſtly complain, *to the particular whim of ignorant people.* Sir Harry was a little ſtunn'd with this whimſical attack, but he did not loſe his good humour, and only ſaid, I ſee you are ſtill the old man, Sir Roger; what ſhould be grave you con-

conſtantly turn to farce; and then left us to run after Miſs Hoyden, who was croſſing towards the palace. When he was gone, ſays Sir Roger to me, Our friend Sir Harry may deſpiſe the old proverb as much as he will, but ſuch *compariſons* will always be *odious*, and it is no wonder, for they will always be abſurd.

LORD MODISH.

I believe, indeed, we muſt leave the beauties of nature, where every thing is perfect in itſelf, to every one's particular taſte, without attempting to diſpute or compare them. But if I give you up that, I hope you will allow us that there may be a good or a bad taſte where the contrivance of man has had a part. What ſay you, for inſtance, to a good taſte in architecture?

COL. FREEMAN.

The ſame, my Lord, that I ſhould ſay to a good taſte in dreſs or cookery, that, abſtracted from health and conveniency, which are the objects of reaſon, it is one of thoſe taſtes which cuſtom, a ſecond nature, has beſtowed upon us; and is ſo much mere taſte that it can never, with any propriety, become a matter of diſpute or compariſon. To inſiſt upon one form of dreſs, or one form of building, being in itſelf more beautiful than another, muſt appear to a philoſopher entering upon as ſenſleſs a controverſy, as the pretending that one diſh was in itſelf

ſelf more palatable than another, and that he who preferred the one had a better taſte than he who preferred the other.

LORD MODISH.

But ſure, Colonel, there are rules for the beauties of architecture, and not the ſmalleſt ornament of a baſe or corniſh without its ſettled proportion.

COL. FREEMAN.

Were that ſtrictly the caſe, my Lord, we ſhould call it knowledge or judgment in architecture, not taſte; for, as far as theſe rules go, no taſte is required, either good or bad. An Artiſt may, by a Palladian receipt alone, without any taſte, form a very elegant Corinthian pillar; as a cook, without any palate, and by the help of the *houſewife's vade mecum* only, makes an unexceptionable diſh of *beef a la daube*. Theſe rules are plainly no more than the analyſis of certain things which cuſtom has rendered agreeable; but do not point out to us any natural ſtandard of beauty or flavour, by which ſuch things, whether pillars or diſhes, could have been originally contrived to anſwer the purpoſe of pleaſing. I ſhould be exceedingly glad to hear a reaſon why a Corinthian capital clapt upon its ſhaft upſide-down ſhould not become, by cuſtom, as pleaſing a ſpectacle as in the manner it commonly ſtands. I know this would be look'd upon as a ſort of blaſphemy

by ſome of our dilettanti; but ſo is every opinion, however reaſonable, which oppoſes what is by cuſtom eſtabliſhed in any country. Perhaps there are countries in the world where my capital is ſo much in taſte, that their virtuoſi would be ſurprized to hear that there was any nation ſo abſurd as to put the volutes uppermoſt. At leaſt there is no imagination of that ſort ſo odd that ſome ſimilar experience is not ſufficient to juſtify and render probable.

LORD MODISH.

How then came the preſent faſhion (ſince you will have it to be no better) of architecture to be ſo univerſally embraced?

COL. FREEMAN.

It's univerſality, my Lord, does not extend beyond Chriſtendom; and, if it ſhould become the taſte of the whole univerſe, the ſame means, which have procured it a reception among us, will account for its further progreſs, without our giving ourſelves the trouble of ſearching for any ſtandard in nature for its recommendation. It is the nature of all faſhions (I except only thoſe of a religious kind) to take their riſe from the ſovereign will and pleaſure of the rich and powerful. Men in ſuch circumſtances are known from thence to acquire a preſumption, which naturally induces them to take the lead in every thing; while thoſe very cir-

circumſtances which engage them to indulge their caprices, enable them at the ſame time to render thoſe caprices reſpectable. As for inſtance, let a man of ordinary rank or figure appear in publick in a coat whoſe cuffs are triangular, when the mode is ſquare; and there is no doubt he will meet with many to deſpiſe, but none to imitate him. Let the ſame be tried by a man bleſt with title, riches, youth, and all the trappings of proſperity; let the ſleeve be of velvet, curiouſly embroidered, and part of a ſuit of cloaths in all other reſpects faſhionable and rich, the triangle will then be found to meet with a quite different reception, and tho' feeble in itſelf, will be ſo powerfully ſeconded by, being incorporated with, the title, the embroidery, the coach, and the footman, as to become part of the auguſt idea of his grace; and ſo far from being able to render him ridiculous, will receive a ſhare of reſpect by being part of him; and from being tolerable, will ſoon become an object of imitation, eſpecially to the perſons who are the moſt intimate with him and his cloaths. The more thoſe imitations encreaſe, the more the ſenſation of their beauty is confirmed; till, in a ſhort time, all other cuffs but the triangular are deteſtable. City taylors bribe his Lordſhip's valet de chambre to let them take it's ſhape and proportions; and here is, at laſt, a preciſe rule eſtabliſhed.

LORD MODISH.

My dear George, this is a lamentable ſinking from architecture to cuffs.

COL. FREEMAN.

I do that, my Lord, in imitation of ſome great men of our acquaintance, who let themſelves down very low in order to riſe with the more ſecurity. The progreſs of faſhion in dreſs, and the feelings which are the conſequence of that progreſs, being the moſt familiar, and having at the ſame time the quickeſt revolutions, are of all others the fitteſt to explain the nature of faſhion in general. The faſhions in building, tho' more durable than thoſe in dreſs, are not for that the leſs faſhions, and are equally ſubject to change. But as ſtones and bricks are more laſting than ſilk and velvet, and as people do not make up churches and palaces ſo often as they do coats and capuchines, we muſt have recourſe to hiſtory for the knowledge of thoſe changes, which we can learn but very imperfectly from our own proper experience. In hiſtory we ſhall find that every nation received it's mode of architecture from that nation which, in all other reſpects, was the higheſt in credit, riches, and general eſtimation. The admiration that attends whatever is great in its dimenſions, coſtly in its materials, and preciſe in its execution, is, as far as our experience goes, univerſal; and naturally inclines the mind in favour of any form which accident has combined

bined with thoſe admirable qualities. The Egyptians were the firſt people we know of who were ſo rich, and at their eaſe, as to build with grandeur, coſt, and neatneſs; and from thence inſpired the Greeks with a love for thoſe ornaments which their caprice had added to the uſeful part of architecture. The Greeks, in their turn, becoming for many ages a free, a rich, and a happy people, had an opportunity of practiſing thoſe arts in many ſumptuous buildings; where, beſide the invention of arches, and other ſolid improvements in the art of building, they made many changes, as their fancy led them, upon the Egyptian ornaments. In this ſtate was architecture when it was tranſplanted to Rome, by a people who, by perpetual wars, had in a ſhort time attained from the meaneſt origin, to the greateſt height of power. Deſtitute of money, and profoundly ignorant of all the arts of peace, they had never raiſed any buildings of which they could boaſt; and no ſooner had they an opportunity of conſidering the Grecian temples and other public works, great in themſelves, and ſet off with all that coſtly materials and the genius of their excellent painters and ſculptors could add to the ſkill of the maſon, but ſtruck with the complex object, they decreed the Greeks to be the only architects in the world, and ſubmitted willingly to receive laws in the arts from thoſe whom their Arms had ſubdued. Perhaps the philoſo-

phy, poetry, and muſic of Greece, for which they began at the ſame time to take a reliſh, ſerved not a little to raiſe the reputation of the Greeks, and might ſtrengthen their authority in architecture; tho' not neceſſarily connected with them. An admiration, to a degree of bigotry ſeized the Roman artiſts and connoiſeurs, and put an effectual ſtop to any farther change or improvement in architecture. Their ſole ſtudy was to imitate the Grecian buildings, and the being like or unlike to them became ſoon the meaſure of right and wrong. Rules ſo compiled were committed to writing, and continue to this day, together with ſome of the antient buildings upon which they were formed, to be the ſtandard of taſte all over chriſtendom. Time may poſſibly produce on it inſenſible changes, but there is almoſt nothing which can be imagined to give it a total overthrow, unleſs Europe ſhould become a conqueſt of the Chineſe.

LORD MODISH.

If the five orders of architecture with all their paraphernalia are to reign in ſplendor, till we are conquered by the Chineſe, they need be under little apprehenſion. But, my dear Colonel, allowing this chimerical conqueſt of yours to take place, why muſt our architecture be deſtroyed along with our freedom? Why may we not as well ſuppoſe that our conquerors ſhould receive the faſhion in

thoſe

thoſe matters from us, as you ſay the conquering Romans did from the Greeks?

COL. FREEMAN.

Becauſe, my Lord, the circumſtances of the conquerors and the conquered would be very different. In China the arts of peace have been long cultivated, and they have been long charmed with buildings, which though of a taſte very bad, according to our notions, are yet more extenſive and more ſumptuouſly adorned than ours. It would be no wonder, then, if they refuſed to change that form of building which long uſage had rendered graceful, for one which had all the awkwardneſs of novelty, without any other advantage to dazle and prepoſſeſs them in its favour. To them the ſimplicity of the antique would appear mean and ruſtic; and Covent-Garden church, the pride of Engliſh architecture, would be judged fitter for a barn than a temple. Neither do I mention this to your Lordſhip upon bare conjecture, but from the ſimilar experience of what formerly happened in Europe when it was overrun by the Goths. I ſee you ſmile at the mention of my friends the Goths; but allow me to tell your Lordſhip the Goths were not ſo Gothic as they are generally imagined. The arts, indeed, of poetry and painting ſeem to have been unknown or neglected among them; but in that they could be little worſe than the peo-

ple they overcame, and in ſome other reſpects they were much their ſuperiors. Civil diſcord, and all the evils that attend anarchy when joined to a moſt contemptible ſuperſtition, had produced in the Roman empire a poverty of every kind, and an almoſt total obliteration of thoſe arts and ſciences for which the ſame nations had been, but a few centuries before, ſo juſtly celebrated. Among the Gothic nations the art of war was well underſtood, as appears by their conſtant ſuperiority, whenever they appeared in the field; and all the ſtates of Europe, who at this day enjoy any of the bleſſings of good government, are ready to own that from this Gothic ſource thoſe bleſſings were derived. But they were not like the Romans, a gang of meer plunderers, ſprung from thoſe who had been, but a little while before their conqueſt of Greece, naked thieves and runaway ſlaves; but a colony from an empire, no leſs than that of the Parthians, which had long ſubſiſted in ſplendor and magnificence; and which, in eſtabliſhing itſelf upon the ruins of the empire of Perſia, had ſucceeded to the greateſt part of its riches, luxury, and elegance. It is in Parthia or Perſia that we muſt look for the origin of thoſe ſhoals of warlike men, and for the origin of that taſte of architecture of which the ſtately examples ſtill remain, like ſo many trophies to mark the progreſs of their victories. And if we turn our eyes to the ſeats of the preſent Sophi

of

of Perſia, we ſhall there ſee the pointed arch, and all the other parts of what we call Gothic architecture, ſtill in high faſhion, and ſtudded over, as Milton ſays, *with barbaric pearl and gold.*

LORD MODISH.

I do remember, now you put me in mind of it, to have ſeen at Sir John Locke's, a collection of drawings repreſenting bridges, palaces, and moſques, done, as he told me, from the buildings themſelves, while he was reſident at Iſpahan; and which very well correſpond with what you ſay concerning the likeneſs between the Perſian and Gothic taſte of architecture. But I ſhould not think that likeneſs, however ſtrong, a ſufficient proof, that thoſe, who have been always called Northern nations, were really the ſons of the Eaſt.

COL. FREEMAN.

There are, my Lord, a great many other proofs of the Parthic or Perſian extraction of the Goths to be gathered from the ſimilitude of language and manners, and even from the hiſtory of their migration. Some of theſe proofs, as they accidentally occurred to me in my reading, I have been at the pains to commit to paper, and ſhall communicate them to your Lordſhip upon your return to London, if your curioſity leads you to the enquiry. But whether they came from Perſia or Peru, it is plain from the ſight of the firſt public buildings

erected by them, upon their entrance into the Roman provinces, that they came from ſome great and eſtabliſhed empire, where the art of building with grandeur and magnificence had been, by the practice of many ages, brought to an uncommon degree of perfection. Structures ſuch as Weſtminſter Abbey, with which Germany, France, and Spain abound, ſo extenſive, yet ſo neat, ſo ſtrong, and yet ſo richly, nay ſometimes finically ornamented, can never be ſuppoſed the contrivance of hungry ſoldiers, during their march through the enemies country; nor of obſcure ſavages, juſt eſcaped from under the ſnows of Sweden and Norway. Such arts are not ſo ſuddenly brought to perfection as to be the offspring of one man's brain; and if they were, yet the concurrence of all the different branches of thoſe invaders, whether Vandals, Huns, Saxons, Normans, or Franks, in the ſame forms and decorations, plainly ſhew that there were certain antient and eſtabliſhed rules for thoſe things, which they all equally knew and reſpected. To men, thus prepoſſeſſed with ideas both grand and preciſe, the buildings they met with in the Roman provinces muſt have appeared mean and flat; and if they deſtroyed any of them without heſitation, whenever they ſtood in their way, it muſt not be attributed to their barbarous inſenſibility of what was elegant; but to their overweening fondneſs for their own taſte, and unreaſonable deſire of impoſing it upon

on others: a malady, which the moſt poliſhed people when unreſtrained by reaſoning and reflection, are equally ſubject to, with the moſt ſavage.

LORD MODISH.

That the Goths did make their taſte of architecture the reigning taſte over Europe for ſeveral ages, I very well know. But, my dear George, your reaſon for its taking place of the Grecian, is not at all ſatisfactory; for if it bore it down at firſt by its loftineſs and richneſs, it might, with much more eaſe, have maintained its ſuperiority, after being familiariſed by time to the conquered, as well as to their invaders. I ſhould conclude, therefore, from the reſtoration of the Greek architecture, that it had ſomething in its forms peculiarly adapted to pleaſe the ſight, which made it at length ſurmount all the obſtacles which force and cuſtom had thrown in its way.

COL. FREEMAN.

Your doubts, my Lord, are exceedingly juſt, and I do not believe that any degree of knowledge in lines and numbers would ever be able to ſolve them. But there are many ſeeming myſteries, and which continue ſuch againſt all the powers of abſtract reaſoning, which hiſtory, by leading us ſtep by ſtep, renders plain and ſimple. For many ages had biſhops and barons, monks and knights errant, kept the people of Europe in ſlavery and diſſention, ſloth, igno-

rance

rance and miſery. All the arts which tended to render life more humane and agreeable, were utterly diſcountenanced and forbid; and thoſe alone kept up and practiſed, which were of uſe in ſupporting the pride and power of thoſe tyrants. Canon law to defend the wordly pretenſions of church-men, and metaphyſics to promote and defend their ſpiritual abſurdities, for the ſame gainful purpoſe, were what paſſed currently by the name of learning. When theſe failed, in determining the truth or falſhood of a propoſition, recourſe was had, legally and coolly, to ſingle combat; a kind of logic, abſurd enough in all conſcience, and yet perhaps not the moſt abſurd kind then in uſe. Painting and ſculpture were not yet found neceſſary to be called in aid of theſe holy cheats; ſo no man, as may well be ſuppoſed, preſumed to carve or draw the reſemblance of any thing upon earth. Military architecture ſhewed itſelf only in the caſtles of private gentlemen, with moats and draw-bridges; and the civil was only to be looked for in cathedrals and cloiſters. The reſt were all hovels and beggary. At laſt, about the fourteenth century, the cloud of ignorance began to diſperſe. The arrogance and avarice of the church of Rome had ſtretched the cord till it cracked, and brought on, in ſeveral parts of Europe, an enquiry into the ſpiritual rights of mankind, which that corporation had ſo groſsly invaded; and theſe having been ſo interwoven

with

with their temporal rights, the enquiry always became the more extenſive, the farther it proceeded; ſo that books, and all the other means of knowledge, became every day more and more in requeſt. About this time the Greeks, flying from the Turks, after the taking of Conſtantinople, brought over their books and language into Italy: which, partly by the countenance and patronage of the family of Medicis, in a little time became a faſhionable part of learning, till then utterly unknown in the Weſt. A like unfortunate cauſe with that which brought over the learned Grecians, had before that time tranſported to Florence ſome Greek painters, bad indeed, but ſufficiently ſkilful to ſow thoſe ſeeds of the art, which, by proper encouragement, firſt at Florence, and afterwards at Rome, Venice, and Bologna, arrived at ſo admirable a degree of perfection. The polite arts, and all the ſeveral branches of true learning, have ſo immediate a connection that they always march together; and it is impoſſible to find any one of them in a tolerable degree, without finding along with it ſome portion of each of the reſt. Thus, at the ſame time that the Greek and Roman claſſics were diligently ſought after, amidſt the duſt and ſcholaſtic nonſenſe of the libraries and convents; the pick-ax was every where employed among the ruins, in ſearch of ſtatues and bas-reliefs, which the ignorance and miſery of the times had ſuffered to lie for ages under ground. At

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the court of Rome, for the ſupport of whoſe power ſome meaſure of true learning was at laſt become neceſſary, theſe enquiries after the learning and elegance of their heathen anceſtors, were carried on with the greateſt eagerneſs; and the riſing love of painting, ſculpture, and muſic, was not a little promoted by the uſe they perceived thoſe arts might be of, in ſupporting a gainful ſuperſtition juſt ready to fall into contempt. Then it was that the Romans began to caſt an eye of admiration upon the noble remains of heathen architecture, with which their city is, to this day, ſo richly ſtored. In that imperial city, the Gothic people, tho' they had, oftener than once, committed horrible devaſtations, had never made any ſettlement, nor ever raiſed any fabric. The buildings there had ever been according to the Grecian taſte; but that being kept up only by tradition, without any preciſe rules, it had changed extremely from its original. To effect a total alteration in the faſhions of any country, is an exceeding difficult undertaking; but here was only required a reformation, and a reformation that had antiquity and primitive purity for its principles. No ſooner, then, was the love of heathen antiquity afloat, but the Bramantes and Michelangelos ſet themſelves with great diligence to meaſure all the parts of all the antient buildings of Rome; and ſoon, by the help of Vitruvius, compoſed a ſyſtem of architecture, which, as far as it pre-

pretended to go, brought back the Auguſtan age to the maſons and carpenters. Florence, and the reſt of the cities of Italy, that were, with reſpect to architecture, in almoſt the ſame ſtate with Rome, entered readily into this ſcheme of reformation, which, croſſing the Alps, with the joint cry of all Italy, at that time the ſchool of learning and politeneſs, carried every thing before it. And thoſe Gothic ſtructures, which had ſo long lorded it over all other works of ſtone and mortar, were now decryed as gigantic and barbarous. Increaſe of trade and riches, all over Europe, particularly from the new-diſcovered Indies, produced a great number of ſumptuous buildings in the new faſhion; ſo that the fondneſs for it, which was probably, at firſt, no more than an affectation of Italian elegance, grew, in a little time, to be a real taſte or ſentiment.

LORD MODISH.

Of buildings did he ſpeak, like Solomon, from the Pyramids of Egypt, even to the Banqueting houſe at Whitehall. As I hope to be ſaved, George, you would make an excellent grand maſter of the free and accepted Maſons, and would prelect upon the wonders of the Letter G, to the aſtoniſhment of the whole lodge. But, ſeriouſly, we are all vaſtly obliged to you for this ſhort hiſtory of a long tranſaction, many particulars of which I knew before, but never before heard them connected in ſo regular a chain.

chain. What you have ſaid to prove that the beauties of architecture have no deeper foundation than faſhion, that is habit formed upon caprice, carries with it great appearance of truth. But you philoſophy men, when you take up any principle, are very apt to carry it farther than it will go, and to a ſingle cauſe often aſcribe an effect which perhaps proceeds from half a dozen. In many caſes I will allow you that habit has a ſhare in forming our ſentiments; but is there not likewiſe an inſeparable connection between beauty and propriety? And will not that which is fit and ſuitable in itſelf, be always more or leſs pleaſing to the beholder?—I am afraid I don't expreſs my meaning in the proper terms.

COL. FREEMAN.

Exactly, my Lord, like one of the trade. Such are the very expreſſions uſed by the followers of Hutchiſon, Shaftſbury, and Plato; who drew, moreover, this very obvious concluſion from them, that, by our different feelings or ſenſations of pleaſure and diſlike, we may ſafely pronounce the objects, from whence thoſe ſenſations ariſe, to be right or wrong in themſelves, without any farther examination or reflection. Happy ſenſe for thoſe who are endowed with it, and for which one would willingly renounce all human underſtanding, which is liable to many errors. What pity is it that ſo pleaſing an opinion, ſo elegant

a ſyſtem

a ſyſtem ſhould have no foundation in fact! Hold up, for a moment, the mirror of experience to this metaphyſical phantom, and it ſhrinks into the nothing from whence it ſprung. The approbation of reaſon, and the approbation of taſte, which thoſe gentlemen have been at ſo much pains to unite and confound, will be found in their nature diſtinct and ſeparate, and to be allotted for viſibly different purpoſes by the author of our nature. That they often coincide is likewiſe true; but it is owing to other cauſes than their natural and inſeparable connection, as will be perceived in examining the caſes where this coincidence does, and where it does not appear. To begin with the moſt ſimple: The apothecary's prentice brings a doſe of the bark to a man ſick of the ague: The reaſon and experience of the phyſician, perhaps the patient's own experience, aſſure him, that ſwallowing this drug will reſtore him to his health. What ſays taſte? That it is the devil of a doſe; that it ought to be put off till to-morrow, and in the mean time calls for t'other bottle of Champaign. Taſte then has no ſkill in phyſick. Let us ſee next whether taſte, in its more remote and figurative applications, is more cloſely allied to fitneſs and utility. Amongſt the objects of ſight, there are none with which we are ſo familiar as thoſe which dreſs exhibits, nor, as I before obſerved to your Lordſhip, ſo proper to produce examples for this ſubject. And

there it will be ever found that our feelings of pleaſure and diſlike are conducted entirely by cuſtom, not only in matters indifferent, but often in oppoſition to what is uſeful and proper. Pray, Lady Modiſh, what would your Ladyſhip think of our fine gentlemen, if they were to dreſs with their arms naked to the elbows?

LADY MODISH.

I ſhould certainly think them very ſhocking creatures; at leaſt if I may gueſs by the diſguſting appearance which butchers and hatters make in the like equipage.

COL. FREEMAN.

Your Ladyſhip, I am perſuaded, ſpeaks not only your own ſentiments, but likewiſe the ſentiments of all the ladies in England, upon the occaſion. All would agree unanimouſly, at firſt, in its being an ugly ſight; and yet it is impoſſible to find out, in the naked arm of a well-proportioned man, any natural impropriety whence this ſentiment of deformity ariſes; nor any that is not equally, at leaſt, attached to the naked arm of a well-proportioned woman, an object which is allowed to raiſe in every one a ſentiment very oppoſite. Cuſtom alone can account for this whimſical taſte, which breaks thro' all rules of reaſon and propriety; for a diſengagement from ſleeves is without doubt

moſt

moſt befitting the ſex which is the moſt active, and deſtined for robuſt exerciſe and labour; and a cloſe covering, eſpecially in a cold climate, the moſt proper for that ſex which ſuffers moſt from its inclemency. I have lived long enough in the world, Ladies, to ſee a great many changes in it, particularly with regard to ſhoe-buckles, which have been now large, now ſmall, now round, now ſquare, and all, in their turns, fraught with beauty and deformity. Theſe changes are productive of much good to many induſtrious tradeſmen and their families, and, generally ſpeaking, very indifferent to the wearers. But I remember, about ſeven or eight years ago, the buckles, from the toes, where they had reigned in ſplendor ſome years before, had inſenſibly crept up to the leg; and ſo great was the deſire, in our ſmarts, of creating pleaſing feelings in the beholders by an amazing length of foot, that I have ſeen many of them limping about Ranelagh with their buckles above the joint, and ſuffering no ſmall torture rather than they ſhould appear with turpitude in a more convenient place. Inſtances of this kind in architecture are not ſo eaſily found. Building is, by its nature, a more ſerious and more deliberate affair than dreſs, and leſs ſubject, one would think, to the influence of whim; yet it is not altogether deſtitute of

examples, where the eye is pleaſed with what is the reverſe of conveniency. For ſome of theſe a general cauſe, or rather origin, may be aſſigned. The preſent taſte of architecture was formed, not upon the palaces and dwelling-houſes of the antient Greeks and Romans, of which there were no veſtiges at the revival of the arts, but upon their temples and other public buildings, from which the ornamental part has been borrowed and applied to domeſtic uſe, in a manner abundantly abſurd, for the moſt part; and which, nevertheleſs, cuſtom has rendered agreeable to the ſight. I could name to your Lordſhip ſeveral houſes, beſides my Lord Mayor's, where the deſire of charming the paſſengers, has induced the architect to darken the principal apartments, by clapping before the windows ſtately pillars which ſupport nothing, or, which is much the ſame, nothing of any uſe. Whatever pains thoſe gentlemen may take to dignify the ornamental part of their art by ſcientific reaſonings about propriety and fitneſs, it will be found at laſt to owe all its power of pleaſing to cuſtom only. Aſk one of them by what means it is, that a window pleaſes by being longer than it is broad, and a chimney by being broader than it is long; he will tell you, that it is from their natural fitneſs for their ſeveral purpoſes, ſuch and ſuch being the nature

nature of light, and ſuch and ſuch being the nature of ſmoak. But let him be ever ſo learned in light and ſmoak, this is but a ſhallow ſolution of the difficulty. The plain truth is, that on account of their fitneſs for their ſeveral purpoſes, they have been from time immemorial ſo formed; but it is the habit of ſeeing them conſtantly ſo formed, and not their fitneſs, which produces in us that ſenſe of their beauty. This proceſs will account for all the conjunctions of beauty and propriety, which to moſt people paſs for neceſſary connections. What is the reaſon that any heavy body, ſupported by few and weak pillars, gives us an unpleaſing feeling? Becauſe the danger and inconveniency of ſuch a diſpoſition has been long known, and with care avoided; ſo that the leaſt infringement of the eſtabliſhed practice will ſhock us immediately by its unuſualneſs, without allowing our reaſon to interfere by a ſlow diſcuſſion of its impropriety. In like manner may we account for all that concerns moral taſte and ſentiment; which will appear, upon the ſlighteſt compariſon of the feelings of different nations with regard to behaviour, to be immediately and neceſſarily dependant upon cuſtom, and but remotely and accidentally connected with right and wrong, or the invariable fitneſs of things.

LORD MODISH.

I begin to be afraid that taſte, at laſt, muſt content himſelf with ruling over the finer arts. There I think you will hardly try to pull him from his throne.

COL. FREEMAN.

What arts does your Lordſhip comprehend under that title?

LORD MODISH.

Muſic, poetry, and painting; or, as they call them, the ſiſter arts.

COL. FREEMAN.

I know they are often ſo called; and indeed there is ſo great a likeneſs betwixt two of them, poetry and painting, that their ſiſterhood will be readily allowed: but betwixt muſick and painting there is no likeneſs at all; and I am apt to ſuſpect that muſick paſſes for the ſiſter of poetry, rather from their being often ſeen in company, than from any reſemblance they bear to each other. For this reaſon, when I examine how far taſte is concerned in theſe arts, I ſhall conſider muſick by itſelf. But either the diſtinction betwixt taſte and judgment, which I gave your Lordſhip ſome time ago, is falſe,

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or elſe taſte is totally excluded from being a determiner in works of art, and muſt leave that taſk for judgment to perform. An art has been thus defined by one of the moſt ſagacious of the antients, *a ſyſtem of rules acquired by ſtudy, and reduced to practice, for ſome uſeful purpoſe.* Now wherever there is a rule or rules, by which any work is ſuppoſed to be conducted, that rule, being known, muſt ſerve equally for a ſtandard to thoſe who would determine with propriety concerning its merit or degree of excellence. An art, then, and whatever pretends to a ſtandard, is an object of judgment and not of taſte. As to muſick, it is certainly an art, ſo far as geometry is concerned in it; but as the mathematical part of muſick is totally unknown to 999 in a thouſand of thoſe who ſet up for connoiſſeurs in muſick, including the performers, we may venture to ſay that it is, with regard to them, no art at all. Theſe virtuoſos, therefore, have nothing but their own taſte, that is, their own private liking, to ſet up for a ſtandard, or, what is little more mathematical, the liking which thoſe of their club, city, or nation have acquired by habit, that is, by the daily repetition of a certain ſtrain of muſick. What diſputes therefore happen upon that ſubject muſt be no leſs abſurd, than when cookery is the ſubject of controverſy. With regard

to the ſiſter arts of painting and poetry, the caſe is very different: for in theſe arts there is not only a ſtandard, but one ſo level to the common ſenſe of mankind, that the moſt ignorant are acquainted with it; and, if it is unknown or miſtaken by any, it is by the half-learned, who from their own conceit, or a reſpect for the authority of coxcombs, have tried to undervalue common ſenſe, in order to ſubſtitute ſomething which they thought better, in its ſtead.

LORD MODISH.

There is no doubt, Colonel, that there are rules for poetry and painting, and that there have been many ingenious books written both in proſe and verſe concerning theſe rules. But I fancy they are not ſo univerſally known as you would have us believe.

COL. FREEMAN.

Pardon me, my Lord; I have reaſon to be convinced by a thouſand experiments, that the leading principle of criticiſm in poetry and painting, and that of all the learned principles which is the moſt unexceptionably true, is known to the loweſt and moſt illiterate of the people. Thoſe experiments are eaſily made. Your Lordſhip has only to hide yourſelf behind the ſcreen in your drawing-room,

room, and order Mrs. Hannah to bring in one of your tenant's daughters, and I will venture to lay a wager that ſhe ſhall be ſtruck with your picture by La Tour, and no leſs with the view of your ſeat by Lambert, and ſhall, fifty to one, expreſs her approbation by ſaying, they are *vaſtly natural*. When ſhe has ſaid this, ſhe has ſhewn that ſhe knew the proper ſtandard, by which her approbation was to be directed, as much, at leaſt, as ſhe would have done, if ſhe had got Ariſtotle by heart and all his commentators. He has defined thoſe arts, *arts of imitation*, and his definition, though often obſcured and confounded by more modern connoiſſeurs, has never been contradicted by any. The ſame country girl, who applauds the exact repreſentation of a man and a houſe which ſhe has ſeen, will, for the ſame reaſon, be charmed with Hogarth's march to Finchly, as that is a repreſentation, though not of perſons, yet of general manners and characters, with which we may ſuppoſe her to be acquainted. And if ſhe is leſs ſtruck with the hiſtorical pictures of diſtant ages and countries, though equally well painted, it is not becauſe her critical ſtandard is not equally applicable to them, but becauſe the ſubject and manners, there meant to be repreſented, are to her unknown, and muſt paſs with as little obſerva-

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tion and remark as a good portrait of a perſon whom ſhe had never ſeen. In all this I ſee no pretenſion taſte has to be conſulted. It requires firſt eyes to ſee, and then judgment to compare the exhibited image with that of the abſent object, which is ſtored up in the remembrance, and is plainly a reflective and compound operation of the mind. It is indeed ſo quick and inſtantaneous, that it often paſſes for a ſimple feeling or ſentiment; and is ſometimes mentioned as ſuch by criticks of no mean reputation, for want of having conſidered the nature of the mental faculties with that accuracy which they deſerved. The general ſtandard of poetry is exactly the ſame, and equally obvious with that of painting; and any experiment you make in that art upon a farmer's daughter, will be found to have a like event. It is only middling poetry which the illiterate do not underſtand and admire; when it arrives at a ſupreme degree of excellence it is adapted to the loweſt claſs; and though other poets might have their partiſans amongſt the critics, there is no queſtion, but Homer was the delight of every cook-maid in Greece.

LORD MODISH.

What, and won't you allow good and bad in poetry to be diſtinguiſhable by taſte upon any occaſion?

COL. FREEMAN.

No, my Lord.

LORD MODISH.

Then, my dear Colonel, your ſpeculations and your common language are very little conſiſtent: for you ſaid, no longer ago than this morning, upon glancing over ſome madrigals which are publiſhed in Rowe's edition of Shakeſpear, that the people of that age had a wretched *taſte* in poetry.

COL. FREEMAN.

It is true, my Lord; and I own myſelf to blame in uſing a word upon any occaſion, which, as appears by the converſation we have had, is applied to ſo many different purpoſes, as to be unfit for any. We have ſeen that it ſometimes ſignifies *the faculty of diſtinguiſhing things ſimply and without compariſon*; ſometimes *that which pleaſes ſimply*; ſometimes *that which pleaſes by particular habit*, but moſt commonly, *that which pleaſes by general habit*, or what is properly expreſſed by the ſingle word *faſhion*. In this laſt ſenſe it was, my Lord, that I underſtood the word taſte, when I ſaid the taſte of poetry was very bad in England, about a century ago; although it

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is certain no age ever more abounded with men of genius and ſtudy.

LORD MODISH.

Darker and darker, by Pluto! I fancied, Colonel, about half an hour ago, that I had got a little light into your ſyſtem, but now I don't ſee one glimpſe. You told us then, that poetry was an art, and the object of judgment, and now you give us to underſtand, that neither imagination, reading, nor reflection, for that I ſuppoſe you mean by genius and ſtudy, are able to keep it in the right road.

COL. FREEMAN.

It is but too true, my Lord; theſe things can avail but little in the conducting of poetry, if faſhion, or, as they pleaſe to call it, taſte, takes it into his head to miſlead her. And when, by the neglect of juſt principles, any nation has habitually acquired a liking or taſte to cookery that is unwholeſome, to architecture that is inconvenient, or to poetry that, inſtead of inſtruction, conveys no ideas, or, what is worſe, falſe ideas to the mind: we may ſay, with great propriety, that ſuch a nation has a vitiated or a bad taſte.

LORD

LORD MODISH.

But how could habit, for I perceive now a little what you mean, ſo ſoon pervert our writers as to lead them all together into the ſame ſort of error, even at the very firſt appearance of poetry in England?

COL. FREEMAN.

To come eaſily, my Lord, to the knowledge of this, it will be neceſſary, once more, to turn our eyes to what was doing in the ages which preceded this. In thoſe days, when miraculous legends under the name of hiſtory, and the abſurdeſt of metaphyſicks by way of philoſophy, compoſed almoſt the whole of learning; poetry, which ever ſhares the fate of hiſtory and philoſophy, was likewiſe at the loweſt ebb. Inſtead of repreſentations of truth, and the real exiſtence of things, it conſiſted only of relations in ryme of giants, winged horſes, griffins, caſtles moated round with fire and brimſtone, knights that killed ten or a dozen men by one blow, and hermits that raiſed as many from the dead by one prayer; with a thouſand other lies, which, however monſtrous and unentertaining they may appear to us, were to thoſe people ſo correſpondent to the ideas that had been early impoſed by authority upon them, that they

appeared not only probable, but true: and although this correſpondence of ideas could not be very ſtriking, as it is impoſſible for the idle chimeras of a writer's brain to be exactly the ſame with thoſe of his reader, yet they ceaſed not, along with perſuaſion, to give them ſome ſort of amuſement. This was the ſtate of the epic; and low as it might be, was only to be found in the happier climates of Italy and the ſouth of France. There likewiſe they pretended to a ſort of lyric poetry, under the name of ſonnets and madrigals, which, being founded upon the metaphyſical quibbling then in vogue, inſtead of the truth of paſſion and ſentiment, was wholly made up of jugling expreſſions, that, with much ſubtlety, kept up a ſeeming relation betwixt thoughts, in themſelves, not at all akin. A ſort of writing, though called by ſome people to this day *wit*, much inferior to fair punning; as it equally trifles with the underſtanding, without the merit of ſhaking the ſides. The arts, however, by the means I mentioned ſome time ago, began to revive; but they did not all keep an equal pace in their improvement. Though hiſtory was ſoon brought, in Italy, to a great degree of excellence, philoſophy, ſtill a ſtranger to experiment, continued to be only a leſs abſurd ſort of metaphyſicks; and by keeping trifling ſubtleties ſtill in requeſt, likewiſe

likewiſe retarded the ſympathetic improvement of poetry: while her ſiſter painting, diſdaining the ſlow, bungling, and deceitful medium of words, ſoon ſhone forth with all the luſtre of nature and truth. All, however, were equally admired by the nations on this ſide of the Alps, who, having ſmall pretenſions of their own, and aſtoniſhed with the tranſcendent glory of Italy, received indiſcriminately every thing that came from thence as the model of perfection. In England, for cauſes that are eaſily aſſigned, the art of painting never took root; but, though none of our artiſts were inſpired with the divine ſpirit of Raphael and Corregio, our poets were much the worſe for having read Dante, Arioſto, and Petrarch; the imitation of whom they preferred to good ſenſe and the imitation of nature. From this cauſe proceeded the tedious allegories, as they call them, of Spenſer, and the jingling and ſtrained conceits of Sir Philip Sidney. Happily for us there were no Italian models for tragedy; elſe Shakeſpear's Othello might have been as poor as his ſonnets; and yet, even in theſe his moſt unrivalled performances, the mode is often ſeen to prevail over the genius and reflection of that great poet. Soon after this importation of Italian taſte, the power and majeſty of the Commons of England began to ſhew itſelf; and as the conteſts concern-

ing the liberty and rights of Chriſtians had introduced a ſpirit of enquiry into Europe, ſo that ſpirit was carried ſtill farther in England, by a new conteſt concerning the peculiar rights of Engliſhmen. Along with liberty all manner of property was farther aſcertained, and that exorbitant power reſtrained, which had been exerciſed by kings and prieſts over the opinions and ſentiments, as well as the goods, of the people. The pleaſure that ariſes from the diſcovery of truth, and the juſt relation of things, is one of the greateſt and moſt laſting which human nature is capable of; and ſo ſtrong it is that to ſtifle and repreſs it requires no ſmall degree of violence. But this being withdrawn, the natural deſire again takes place, and always with ſucceſs. So it happened in England, where learning went hand in hand with the conſtitution in all its changes. As liberty and order grew, learning and juſt ſentiments flouriſhed; as thoſe degenerated into enthuſiaſm and anarchy, a like feaver ſucceeded in the ſtate of literature. It was madneſs, indeed, but it was of the vigorous ſort, from whence much good was ſtill to be expected. Accordingly, upon the return of a more ſettled government at the Reſtoration, when liberty was tempered by a certain degree of fixed ſubordination, the ſciences likewiſe took a more orderly and more polite

turn,

turn, without giving up any of that freedom which they had assumed. Party controversies lost much of their acrimony, and men began to use the weapons and dexterity which they had acquired in these contests, to more peaceable and more valuable purposes. The Royal Society was founded, and those hints which Sir Francis Bacon had given with regard to experimental philosophy, were diligently prosecuted by the ingenious men of that age; so that authority began, by little and little, to give way to matter of fact, supposition to certainty, and words to things. But though in motion, still the progress of poetry was slow. It is not enough for poets to compose in times of good sense: it is necessary, in order to their writing well, that they should be born in such times. The ideas, which fill the infant imagination, will always, more or less, keep possession of it; and are not easily to be changed by later knowledge and reflection. Notwithstanding these new improvements in knowledge, the gentle Waller still decked his Sachariſſa, with such unscented gum-flowers as had adorned the Laura of Petrarch; and still Milton thought it proper to march his angels in a cubic phalanx of well-bodied air, to attack as formidable a body of devils, who received them with cannon in their hands, and puns in

 their

their mouths. Intrepid devils, that knowing themſelves to be immortal, dared to look death in the face, and to expoſe their unſubſtantial forms to be pierced by the immaterial ſpears of their adverſaries. What greater inſtance can be required of the deteſtable influence of romantic and ſcholaſtic jargon, than its producing ſuch a hodge-podge in the brain of a man who has given ſuch proofs upon other occaſions, of a truly natural and noble genius. At laſt the Revolution, by eſtabliſhing the rights of the ſeveral orders in the commonwealth upon a clear and ſolid baſis, made way for an entire diſſolution of that alliance, which had long been ſo ſtupidly and villainouſly cemented betwixt religion and politics. Metaphyſics, now no longer neceſſary in ſupport of opinions which were now no longer uſeful in the acquiſition of power and riches, ſunk by degrees into contempt; and Nature having at laſt ſhewn her true and beautiful face, poetry, from acting the part of a magic lanthorn teeming with monſters and chimeras, reſumed her genuine province, like the camera obſcura, of reflecting the things that are. The antient Greek and Roman poets being found to have conducted themſelves more than any other, by this principle, the admiration of them encreaſed; and they, inſtead of the Italians, were cho-

ſen, to ſet the faſhion, or, as we call it, to form the taſte of writing. From them, and from their miſtreſs Nature, Prior, Addiſon, Pope, Swift, Parnel, and the reſt of their cotemporary bards, received the leaven, and conveyed it, in their works, to the whole maſs of the people. At this very day, when few men take the trouble of becoming very learned, and fewer give to the public any proofs of their poetic fire, the taſte acquired by the laſt age in certain kinds of poetry, ſtill continues; and the moſt inſipid odes, that appear in the magazines, are better able to ſtand a critical diſcuſſion, than thoſe that were written by the brighteſt wits a hundred years ago.

LORD MODISH.

Then you eſteem thoſe magaziners to be good critics, though but paultry poets; I ſhould think that required ſomewhat more learning than you ſeem willing to allow them.

COL. FREEMAN.

No more, my Lord, than it requires knowledge of geometry to navigate a ſhip to Jamaica; which, though it ariſes from the deepeſt rules of ſcience, is daily performed by thoſe who never heard of Euclid, and who are not capable to go through the eaſieſt

of his demonſtrations. Theſe arts, though it coſt many ages of ſtudy to men of genius to bring them to perfection, are, as far as regards a limited practice, eaſily communicated, by rote, to the greateſt dunce. A very good pilot, who ſhould venture to diſpute upon the principles of navigation, would probably diſcover extreme ignorance; and the ſame daily happens to men of mere taſte whenever they meddle with criticiſm: ſo far is good criticiſm from being a vulgar thing, that even the taſte of the public, is ſtill falſe in ſome kinds of poetry, particularly in tragedy; under which auguſt title five acts of language, ſuch as no mortal man ever ſpoke, ſeldom fails of putting the profits of three full houſes into the author's pocket. A convincing proof that thoſe who frequent the theatre judge of the elegance of a poem, as they do of the cock of a hat, and have nothing to influence them in their determination but mere taſte, or a feeling of what is become by habit agreeable to them. Were they to judge by the principles of art, their deciſions would be equally juſt in all kinds of writing.

LORD MODISH.

I hope you don't lay this likewiſe to the charge of the poor Italians; for I don't think

think we have ever been much troubled with their tragedies.

COL. FREEMAN.

No, my Lord, it proceeds, I apprehend, from an influence much more powerful and popular, the example of our own Shakeſpear; though, perhaps, the French tragedians have not been wanting with their aſſiſtance.

LORD MODISH.

This is ſomewhat new from you, Colonel, who uſed to ſpeak with raptures of the genius of Shakeſpear.

COL. FREEMAN.

It is that very genius, my Lord, which is the cauſe of this evil; and we may ſay of it as Cato ſays of Cæſar's virtue, *Curſe on his genius, it has undone his Country.* Dazled by the ſhining parts of ſuch eminent perſonages, we are inſenſibly led to admire and to imitate, without diſtinction, every thing that belongs to them. What we cannot admire, at firſt, or what we even diſapprove, we receive with difference, and uſe brings us in time to be more or leſs pleaſed with it. All with juſtice applaud when Hotſpur

gives the contemptuous deſcription of the courtier who came to demand his priſoners, ſo full of that pride and vivacity which conſtitute his character; but it was never yet known that the pit treated the actor with a hiſs, or an *off*, *off*, *off*, when, in his relation of Mortimer's combat with Glendower, he ſays

Three times they breath'd, and three times did they drink,
Upon agreement, of ſwift Severn's flood,
Who then affrighted with their bloody looks,
Ran fearfully among the trembling reeds,
And hid his criſped head in the hollow bank,
Blood-ſtained with theſe valiant combatants.

LORD MODISH.

There are, no doubt, falſe thoughts to be found in Shakeſpear; but as it is equally certain they do not bear any proportion to thoſe that are juſt and noble, may not we reaſonably ſuppoſe, that the imitation of him ſhould be more uſeful than hurtful to our modern tragedians.

COL. FREEMAN.

That is a happineſs, my Lord, which never yet befell the imitators of any of the great maſters. To equal them in their beauties they muſt draw them, as they did, from the pure fountain of nature. Their faults they may acquire from them, as they acquired them from other faulty poets. Had not Shakeſpear been perverted by wrong taſte and imitation, he could never have produced ſuch lines as thoſe I have repeated. Nature could never have pointed out to him that a river was capable of cowardice, or that it was conſiſtent with the character of a gentleman, ſuch as Piercy, to ſay *the thing that was not*. It is good rules alone that can ſave a poet from ſuch blunders, which taſte is ever ready to lead him into.

LORD MODISH.

Want of rules might indeed have been the cauſe of thoſe errors in Shakeſpear; but that is not, ſurely, the caſe with the modern tragedians, either French or Engliſh. They have had critics and rules in abundance.

COL. FREEMAN.

No doubt they have, my Lord; but ſuch critics as are worſe than none; and ſuch

rules as ſerve to miſlead their obſervers to ſuch a degree, as to make them leſs fit to judge of poetry than nurſes and children: rules that are drawn from the works of authors, and not from common ſenſe, or the general feelings of mankind. Aſk one of thoſe criticks for a reaſon, and he gives you an authority; if you repeat your demand, it's ten to one but he fobs you off with one of thoſe cramp words, that Lady Harriot has ſuch a diſlike to. As for inſtance, if you aſk Boſſu, or any of the reſt of the Ariſtotelians, how the Severn came to be ſo hen-hearted, as to turn tail and hide itſelf, on the ſight of Glendower's and Mortimer's bloody faces, he will tell you that it is by a figure called proſopopoia. This it is to underſtand Greek. A ſoundheaded, though leſs learned critick, would probably have ſaid, that it was by a figure called nonſenſe.

LORD MODISH.

What, and do you deſpiſe the poetics of Ariſtotle, which have been revered through ſo many ages?

COL. FREEMAN.

Far from it, my Lord; I look upon them as a moſt valuable remnant of antient erudi-

tion;

tion; and, taking all circumſtances into the account, a prodigious proof of the genius of the author. But I muſt own I deſpiſe thoſe moderns, who overlooking all the new diſcoveries, which time, perhaps, rather than human wit, has produced for them, do ſtill, by a moſt unholy bigotry, put their truſt in his infallibility. What would you think, Lady Harriot, of a critick who could not conceive a dramatic entertainment to ſubſiſt, with any degree of excellence, without a perpetual accompanyment of muſic?

LADY HARRIOT.

Indeed, Colonel, I ſhould fancy that he had never ſeen any thing but Italian operas.

COL. FREEMAN.

Your Ladyſhip's gueſs, is not far wide of the mark; and yet, ſuch is the ſentiment of the great Greek, of whoſe profound knowledge you muſt have read ſuch wonders in Pope, and the reſt of the Belles-lettres-writers of your acquaintance. If any of our London connoiſſeurs were to adviſe Garrick to get Othello ſet to muſick, by way of giving it more force and expreſſion, it is not likely he would be any more conſulted in theatrical matters. Not that I mean to detract from the real merit of Ariſtotle. His

poetic

poetic ſyſtem will ever deſerve the attention of the learned, as it is founded upon the ſolid baſis of experience; but as this was only the experience of what pleaſed in his age and country, it is too narrow a baſis to erect ſo lofty a pile upon, as an art of poetry. Inſtead of ſearching into nature for ſome univerſal principle of pleaſure in that art, by which he might in time form the taſte of his own, and of every country, he, from what happened in his time to be their taſte, formed thoſe rules which have been tranſmitted to us, and received as a work of deep philoſophy, and in which the whole myſtery of writing was revealed.

The more we examine into facts, the more reaſon we ſhall have to be convinced, that taſte ought never to be allowed to dictate in poetry; ſince, when ever taſte happens to be good, it is only the conſequence, not the cauſe of good writing. Judgment and rules, whoſe humble ſervant and follower taſte ought to be, are alone fit to decide, whether he is right or wrong.

LORD MODISH.

So then, good taſte in poetry proceeds from good poetry, good poetry from good philoſophy, and good philoſophy from good government. A very curious genealogy.

COL.

Col. FREEMAN.

I have never yet, my Lord, met with any thing to convince me it was not a true one. And it is worth remarking, that the Italians, having recovered but little freedom in religion and government, are ſtill extreamly behind their neighbours, the French and Engliſh, in point of philoſophy, and retain pretty much the ſame taſte of poetry which they had two hundred years ago. Arioſto is ſtill preferred to Taſſo, and both to Homer; not only by the common run, but by thoſe who ſet up for criticks amongſt them. As if a poet were to be eſteemed excellent, in proportion as he departs from the imitation of nature, or the deficiency in that reſpect were to be compenſated by a muſical gingle and flowing combination of ſyllables.

In ſhort, my Lord, altho' truth and falſehood, right and wrong, uſeful and prejudicial, proper and improper, will ever be univerſally the ſame in themſelves, and their boundaries capable of being accurately diſtinguiſhed by human reaſon; yet the taſtes, feelings, and opinions of men, concerning any thing, muſt never be admitted as evidence of its being in itſelf good or bad: Since a very few experiments may point out to us that thoſe taſtes, depending upon various tempers, accidents and habits,

habits, are as numerous and various as the men, or ſets of men, who are actuated by them. A variety the leſs to be argued againſt, as it is manifeſtly productive of general happineſs, and in ſo great a degree that we may juſtly pronounce any ſociety of men in an unnatural ſtate, whenever they are deprived of the benefits ariſing from it. Whatever pleaſes, pleaſes; whether it be an ode of Horace, or a ſermon of Whitfield; and whoever is made happy with either, he has my moſt hearty congratulations, neither, were I willing to condemn him, ſhould I know how to go about it. But if not content with this toleration, he perſiſts in affirming that the one of theſe is in itſelf preferable to the other; I expect that he will lay aſide his taſte, and give me his reaſons. Upon ſuch like occaſions it has ſometimes, too often, happened that in default of reaſons, force, and terror have been applied, in order to produce an uniformity in thinking, and to render the taſte and opinion of the ſtrongeſt, the catholic, or univerſal. And then, woe! to the wretched ſons of Adam!

LADY MODISH.

My Lord, are you for drinking tea under the oak, or ſhall it be brought hither?

LORD

LORD MODISH.

I think, my dear, it will be pleaſanter out of doors this fine evening. Well, Colonel, I ſee this is your day; and that I am but ill prepared to be a champion for taſte. But, as Patroclus ſays to Hector, you have not long to enjoy your triumph; for to-morrow I expect Jack Maggot. He, you know, is a great *dilettante*, and full of taſte to the brim; and I doubt not of ſeeing you brought to ſhame for the complication of hereſies you have uttered this afternoon.

COL. FREEMAN.

My Lord, I accept the challenge, and deſire only a clear ſtage. Allons.